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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002256

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [GAZA](#) [DISENGAGEMENT](#) [GOI](#) [INTERNAL](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#)

SUBJECT: LIKUD MK SA'AR OPPOSES WITHDRAWAL PLAN BUT

PREDICTS REFERENDUM ENDORSEMENT

REF: A. TEL AVIV 2250

[B](#). TEL AVIV 1906

Classified By: Political Counselor Norm Olsen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: Likud MK Gideon Sa'ar told poloff on April 18 that he will quietly oppose PM Sharon's disengagement plan even though he is certain that the plan will win a majority in the May 2 Likud referendum. Sa'ar objects to the plan since it requires withdrawing from Gaza and four northern West Bank settlements without obtaining anything from the Palestinians in return. He fears that implementing the plan will be seen by terrorist organizations as their victory and will leave Israel without future bargaining chips in negotiations. Sa'ar said that despite his opposition to the plan, he will support it after it wins approval in the referendum, and that he hopes Likud can convince right-wing coalition partners to remain in the government even after Cabinet approval of the plan. End summary.

Sa'ar Goes Against the Tide

[2](#). (C) Hours after the April 18 announcements by several key Likud ministers that they would support PM Sharon's disengagement plan (ref A), Likud faction leader and first-term MK Gideon Sa'ar told poloff that "Sharon has the wind on his back" and predicted a Likud majority will support the PM's plan in the referendum. Despite his prediction, Sa'ar told poloff he opposes the plan and will vote against it in the May 2 Likud referendum. Sa'ar added that he will not join any of his fellow Likud colleagues' campaigns against the plan, such as that of Agriculture Minister Yisrael Levy or Minister-Without-Portfolio Uzi Landau. Sa'ar said he recognizes that most Israelis want change and hope that disengagement will improve the overall security situation. Once the plan is approved in the Likud referendum, Sa'ar stated firmly that he will then support the plan as well.

[3](#). (C) Sa'ar stressed that for now, he could not support the Prime Minister's plan on principle since it requires Israel to withdraw from all of Gaza and four West Bank settlements without obtaining any quid pro quo from the Palestinians. Israel would lose important bargaining chips in any future negotiations with the Palestinians, he argued. "Israel did not make out so well" in PM Sharon's April 14 letter exchange with President Bush, Sa'ar claimed. In exchange for President Bush's "words," Sa'ar emphasized, Israel gave up all Gaza settlements, four settlements in the West Bank and, according to Sa'ar, overall settlement growth.

Victory for Terrorists

[4](#). (C) Sa'ar also opposes unilateral disengagement because he believes it sends the wrong signal to Palestinian extremists who, he fears, will claim a victory when they see Israeli settlers packing up and leaving Gaza. They will view the evacuation of Gaza, says Sa'ar, as the result of a successful terrorist campaign and not as a result of bilateral negotiations. Sa'ar stressed it would have been much more advantageous to move forward with a Gaza withdrawal in steps, along with a Palestinian partner, but said there is no acceptable Palestinian partner currently. "None of the moderate (Palestinian leaders) have a chance while Arafat is around," he said.

Holding the Coalition Together

[5](#). (C) Sa'ar said the threats of the right-wing coalition parties -- the National Religious Parties and the National Union -- to leave the coalition if the plan is approved by the Cabinet (after it receives a majority in the referendum) are not yet certain. Even National Union Chairman Avigdor Lieberman, says Sa'ar, may decide to stay in his ministerial seat. Sa'ar confirmed that he and other Likud MKs were trying to convince these parties to stay in the coalition even after the plan is approved. "We prefer if the right-wing stays" rather than having Labor join the

coalition, Sa'ar stressed.

Pushing Away Thoughts of Mazuz

16. (C) Sa'ar declined to speculate on the possibility that Attorney General Menachem Mazuz would recommend that PM Sharon be indicted on bribery charges in the Greek Island Affair (ref B). He told poloff that he "cannot think about (the issue.)" He did underline, however, his view that Mazuz could only lean on the weight of the evidence at hand when making his decision, not on subjective matters such as whether indicting Sharon would be for the national good.

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KURTZER